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PROBATION WORK FOR WOMEN

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Probation is no longer an experiment, but has become as truly a part of the correctional and reformatory system as the reformatory itself. It is for the convicted girl or woman a system of discipline and correction—a process of character building under the guidance of a probation officer who is a counsellor and friend. The success of probation depends upon the careful selection of persons who are to receive the benefits of it, the character of supervision that is exercised over probationers and the spirit, ability and personality of probation officers charged with the execution of this most important work.

As the long procession of fifty, one hundred or one hundred and fifty girls and women passes before the bar of justice in a single night at the Night Court in New York City, between nine in the evening and three in the morning, one observes with the older and more hardened offenders some younger girls less familiar with the surroundings of the court. There are many girls and women arrested for soliciting on the streets for immoral purposes, or plying their trade of prostitution in tenement houses, and others who have been charged with intoxication, vagrancy, disorderly conduct and with being incorrigible and wayward girls. The women are no longer in the toils of the professional bondsmen as they were before the Night Court was established, when arrests were made not alone because women were guilty, but because it was known that they would pay the customary fee for the privilege of being bailed out at night. Now all have a right to an immediate trial and to be discharged at once if found innocent.

It is within the discretion of the magistrate after finding a defendant guilty to sentence her immediately, to hold for further examination or to remand for sentence. Most of the women are sentenced at once by the magistrates, and it is largely a matter of chance dependent on the opinion of the magistrate who is sitting, whether a girl is discharged, fined, placed under a good behavior

bond, committed to workhouse or reformatory or released on suspended sentence and placed on probation. If a woman who is guilty is discharged at once, she frequently has only a contempt for the law and feels that she can violate it again with impunity. It neither helps nor punishes a woman convicted of soliciting on the streets to impose a fine upon her, nor does it act as a deterrent in any way. She pays a fine of two or three dollars, and often leaves the courtroom smiling to think she has escaped so easily, and returns at once to her life of prostitution and the streets. If she is fined five or ten dollars, and does not have the money, she sends at once to the disorderly "Raines law" hotel which she frequents and which promises to protect her. The good behavior bond is as ineffective as the fine. She must pay for securing some one to furnish her bond and thereby finds herself still further enslaved. If she offends against the law during the period she is under the good behavior bond, no action is taken to secure the forfeiture of it and the bond becomes meaningless.

The workhouse sentence with imprisonment for five or twenty days does not help any girl, and if it is six months it may really harm her. Recently I went to the Workhouse to see a girl, eighteen years of age, committed for a period of six months. She had been leading a life of prostitution for two months at the time of her arrest and had never been in court before. "I wouldn't care so much if only the judge thought he was reforming me by putting me here," she said, "but he must know girls can't get better by coming in cells with such dreadful women."

During the period of the shirtwaist strike we saw girls of sixteen, seventeen and eighteen years of age placed in the same cells with prostitutes in our jails and workhouse—a severe arraignment of our method of dealing with offenders.

Our courts and magistrates are very slowly recognizing that it is better for girls who need to be separated from society for a time to be in a reformatory where they can receive industrial training and further preparation for life and for work, than to be confined in cells in a prison.

A system of careful questioning, investigation and identification and wise judgment based on these is necessary to determine who are worthy of being released on probation. It is not merely a question of age or experience or number of arrests, but of poisoned minds, diseased bodies and weakened wills.

Instructed often by the older women with whom she associates in the station house or detention pen at the court, the young girl of seventeen arrested for the first time often declares she is twenty-one years of age, gives a false name, false address and says that her parents are dead or living out of the city. If she is sufficiently brave, as she is cautioned to be, and does not appear frightened or concerned about her arrest, and if her manner of dress sufficiently disguises her age, she may slip through easily with a fine, providing no investigation is made. If placed at once on probation, she leaves the court and because of the false address the probation officer may never see her again. If, however, she is closely questioned as to the place where she is living, the addresses of parents and relatives and the place where she was last employed, and is held for examination or remanded for sentence while these addresses are verified by the probation officer, the true facts will be revealed.

To provide for the younger girls paroled in my custody while probation officer in the Night Court and so prevent them from remaining in cells in the prison, and also to care for them more effectively after they were released on probation, we opened Waverley House, at 165 West Tenth Street, February, 1908. Classes in sewing, cooking, basketweaving, English and gymnastics were organized to keep the girls employed even during the short period while they were held for examination.

Among those who have come to Waverley House have been girls of fifteen and seventeen years who claimed to be eighteen years old, arrested for intoxication and larceny, a runaway girl, sixteen years old, who had been placed in the same cell with a woman convicted three times of prostitution and a girl of seventeen who had been occupying the same cell in the prison with two women charged with her abduction.

It has been possible by winning the confidence of the girls to learn their true stories and in some cases to obtain evidence against those who were responsible for taking them away from home.

As the result of the physical examination while at Waverley House, girls found to be suffering from venereal disease have been committed to institutions from which they could be transferred to hospitals for treatment or sent directly to hospitals. In other cases, even of girls seventeen years of age, their physical or mental condition or both have been found to be due to the use of cocaine or

opium. Observations made at Waverley House have shown that at times girls were considered criminal when in reality they were feeble minded, insane or not mentally responsible, and have been committed to the Psychopathic Ward at Bellevue Hospital or sent to an institution especially adapted for them.

Waverley House has shown the need of a municipal detention house near the Night Court where there can be segregation of the different classes of offenders and where the younger girls held under order of the court can be free from the contaminating influence of the more hardened women. During the period of detention, helpful occupation should be provided and all convicted of prostitution should be required to have a physical examination.

Some system of identification is essential so that it can be determined the number of times the defendant has been previously arrested and the sentence imposed. During six months while the fingerprint system of identification was employed in the Tenderloin Station, 1217 women were arrested 3145 times. One woman was arrested 17 times during this period and never sent to the Workhouse or placed on probation and another was arrested five times during the same month for the same offense and after being fined twice and committed to the Workhouse once, was placed on probation at the time of the fourth arrest.

T. M. was arrested one week after entering a life of prostitution and fined five dollars. Six months later, when again arrested, the magistrate released her on probation. The girl was pregnant and has since given birth to a child. She declares that at the time of her first arrest she would have welcomed the opportunity to get away from her bad life if the magistrate had only offered it to her.

It remains for the magistrate who is in possession of the facts with regard to the previous record of the girl, her home environment, her health condition and her mental attitude, to consider carefully, in view of these, what is the wisest and best disposition to make. When one considers how it may affect the whole future life of a girl and determine whether it is to be useful or harmful, one is forced to conclude that it should not be merely a matter of chance whether she is fined three dollars or committed for three years, sent to the Workhouse or released on probation. There should be more intelligent handling of these cases and more uni-

formity of action on the part of the different magistrates who have in view helping instead of punishing the individual girls.

When the defendant is released on probation she is placed under the care of a probation officer, charged to be of good behavior and required to report to the probation officer. For a minor offense the period of probation varies from one to six months and for a misdemeanor or felony may be a much longer time. Card records are kept by probation officers and statistical reports sent monthly to the State Probation Commission. In supervising those under her care and in making probation a truly helpful influence the probation officer finds her real work. The following have proved to be essential to adequate supervision:

1. Visiting probationers in their homes and obtaining co-operation of relatives.
2. Securing employment for those out of work.
3. Providing medical care when necessary.
4. Bringing probationers in touch with helpful influences and establishing friendly relations with them so that they come freely for advice and help.
5. Receiving reports from probationers individually apart from the court.
6. Securing revocation of probation and commitment to reformatory institution in the event of violation of the terms of release.

If a girl has a good home it is the wisest and best thing for her to return to it and parents are usually willing to receive her when facts are explained to them. It is not always wise to tell the entire story, but enough to show them that the girl is in grave moral danger and should be more carefully guarded. The probation officer must then visit the home in order to judge of the conduct of the probationer and not depend entirely upon the girl's statement at the time she reports. When the home is not in New York and the probationer returns to another city, some one, preferably the probation officer, if probation work is organized there, should be notified of it and supervision continued. We can also continue to keep in touch with her by writing to her and her parents. Girls who have come to Waverley House from the Night Court have been returned to their homes in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Missouri, Indiana, Ohio and other states. Several have been sent back to their homes in other countries.

Effort should be made to secure the kind of employment for probationers for which they are best fitted. Some have had experience at housework, in factory or office, and can be placed without difficulty; others are entirely without training or experience, and must be instructed or placed at unskilled work. In placing girls in families it is best to tell the employers frankly with regard to their past record and secure their co-operation in befriending and helping the girls.

The inability to work and consequent difficulty in getting along at home, have been found to be due in some cases to physical causes which required correction. Before going to work, girls should know that they are in good physical condition and have a clean bill of health.

Helpful influences must be brought to bear upon the girls in order to hold them. There are clubs and classes in settlements, churches and various organizations open to those who have been in danger, but have not been leading an immoral life. The work with the girls who have erred must be largely individual and personal, and in this the help of some interested volunteer workers can be utilized if wisely and carefully directed.

Probationers are required to report regularly weekly or bi-weekly, and under right conditions this affords an opportunity for the probation officer to keep closely in touch with her charges and is beneficial. The real value of reporting is, however, lost if the probationers are required to report at a court or before the entire group of probation officers. It is unwise for them to be brought each week into the environment of the court and to feel that they are on exhibition before a group of men and women probation officers, or to be seen by other girls who are guilty of the same or widely different offenses. The period of probation is far too short in many cases, and a minimum of six months and maximum of two years would be far more satisfactory in cases of girls arrested for waywardness, intoxication or prostitution, as well as for those charged with larceny.

The law provides that if the probationer violates the terms under which she has been released, a warrant may be issued for her arrest and she may be sentenced in the same manner as though she had not been placed on probation. It is useless, as is done at times in our courts, to impose a fine or place under a good behavior bond

or commit for five days to the workhouse for violation of probation. Because a girl fails when the first chance has been given to her, it does not mean that there is not hope of further helping her. She may need more constant supervision than the probation officer can give her, and a period of industrial and moral teaching and training in a reformatory institution.

Approximately one-third of the girls and women placed on probation in the magistrates' courts of New York City are reported as absconding or otherwise violating the terms of their probation, and yet it is by no means true that the lives of two-thirds of the women are changed in any vital way by the probation experience. Some who ostensibly adhere to the terms of probation return to a bad life soon after the probation period expires. As I have worked constantly with girls during the period of probation, subsequently visiting them in their homes, finding work for them and helping them in every way that I could, I am convinced that about one-third have been permanently helped.

Probation has proved to be most successful with the girls from sixteen to twenty years of age charged with being ungovernable and incorrigible and in danger through bad association. Many of the incorrigible girls have run away from their homes and have been leading an immoral life for a few days or weeks and have been with dangerous companions.

Sarah was arrested on complaint of her married sister, who said that the girl had been associating with bad companions and was ungovernable. The sister was forced to admit that her husband had told Sarah to leave the house when she had no money for her board. During fifteen months of the two years she had been in this country from Austria she had worked in four different factories, earning from three to four dollars a week, and had been "laid off" from each one because work was slack. Every cent she received had been given to her sister. She had no place to stay the night she was told to leave her sister's home, and a man whom she met in a restaurant offered to provide a room for her. For a few weeks before her arrest she had been leading an immoral life, but had refused to go on the streets to earn money by prostitution as several men had tried to persuade her to do. She has married since her probation period expired and is leading a good, honest life. Recently she celebrated her eighteenth birthday.

In cases of intoxication of young girls and of women, some of them mothers of families, it is possible to do much by probation. The home visits and friendly relations of the probation officer aid much and serve to encourage the probationer.

Two young girls who claimed to be seventeen years of age were arraigned in the Night Court for intoxication and released on probation. When investigation was made the following day, the probation officer learned that it was the first offense of each, and that one was but fifteen years old. By frequently visiting the homes and securing the co-operation of their families, both girls were helped just at the time when they had begun to form dangerous friendships and were getting beyond the control of their parents.

The girl who has been leading a life of prostitution for a very short time, and has entered upon it through the influence of some man who has secured power over her or because she was temporarily in distress and did not know which way to turn, may be helped by probation. Application of probation to the older, hardened prostitutes is useless and tends to bring discredit upon the whole system.

An Austrian girl, sixteen years old, had been soliciting on the streets for three nights. She had been in the country little more than a year and had worked steadily until three weeks before her arrest. A man whom she met at a dance hall on the lower East Side, where she spent her Sunday evenings, induced her to enter upon an immoral life, and sent her to the streets to earn money by a life of prostitution. During her probation period, and for eight months since it expired, she has worked faithfully, and last week returned to her home in Europe with money she had saved by her work.

When G. R., eighteen years old, was arrested for prostitution in a tenement house, she told the true story of how she had been induced to leave her home. A young Italian man whom she met at an amusement park promised her a position where she would earn more money and have an easier time than in the Brooklyn factory where she was working. He brought her to New York and placed her in a house of prostitution. She was paroled in my custody as probation officer while careful investigation was being made, and sufficient evidence secured against the man who lived on her earnings. He was convicted and sentenced to the workhouse. G. R. returned to her home and has since been working for one year in the same factory where she was employed until two weeks before her arrest.

The New York Probation Association organized to maintain Waverley House, and to aid in the development of probation work, co-operates with the courts and with probation officers. Probation officers from the different courts are free to bring girls to Waverley House as witnesses, while pending investigation, for physical examination or until the best method of helping them is discovered. An employment bureau is maintained by the Association, and positions found for those who are able to go to work. Railroad tickets are provided for girls who are willing to return to their homes in other cities and would be unable to do so otherwise. During the summer of 1909, Hillcrest Farm was maintained by the Association as a home for probationers, where girls with their babies and those who had not been well could spend a few days or weeks out of doors before they were able to go to work.

The Association is not only interested in helping the individual girls and seeking to improve probation work, but in understanding the causes of the failure of these girls so as to prevent others from entering the ranks. We have learned that many girls have entered upon a life of immorality or prostitution through the influence of procurers, men who live on the proceeds of prostitution, and older prostitutes, because they were deserted by men who had promised to marry them, or because of ignorance or conditions at home, at work or at play. The crowded homes in the congested quarters of our city, where sweatshop work goes on, and others where there is lack of understanding and sympathy, the grinding work at low wage in factory and shop with the accompanying temptations, the love of amusement which finds its gratification in wretched dance halls, where the girls first learn to drink and meet dangerous companions—all these are partially responsible.

Extraordinary efforts must be made to convict procurers, check the spread of prostitution in the tenement districts and prevent the opening of disorderly resorts side by side with our factories or stores. Then much must be done to improve conditions under which our girls live and work and play, so that there will be fewer avenues of approach to a life of wretchedness. In helping those who are in danger of becoming morally depraved, and so preventing them from coming to the courts and in aiding probation work in the courts, a volunteer probation association finds a large field for usefulness.

With the probation officer rests the ultimate success or failure of probation work. The work for girls and women must be done by women who bring to it intelligence, common sense, tact, skill, sympathy and enthusiasm, faith in human nature and in the task they are undertaking. They must be efficient and trained workers and women with personality. Theirs is the difficult task of influencing characters and lives, of bringing others to forget the things that are behind and to reach forth to the things that are before, of stimulating ambition and inspiring to noble purpose in life.